Saskatchewan
Agriculture
and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Farm and Food Report is produced weekly by Zapwell Communications Group for Communications Branch, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food
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2007-02935/

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UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN OFFERS NEW AGRIBUSINESS DEGREE

For the first time in the fall 2006 semester, the University of Saskatchewan's Department of Agricultural Economics is offering students the opportunity to earn a Bachelor of Science in Agribusiness.

The course of study will allow students to develop the key business management, analytical and economics skills necessary to become the agri-food business managers of the future.

According to the department's course calendar, the Bachelor of Science in Agribusiness degree program is made up of a combination of science, economics, agricultural economics and business courses. Graduates will understand the structure and organization of the agri-food sector, and will learn business skills with particular application to the value chain.

Agricultural Economics department head Jill Hobbs said the impetus for the new degree program came from "a recognition that a lot of students are interested in these areas, but did not have sufficient access to the courses they needed."

She used the example of students headed into the University of Saskatchewan's School of Commerce, whose real ambition might be to work in the agri-food sector. "This program provides a blend of core economics along with marketing and research skills in the sector," she said.

As is the case with most undergraduate degrees, the Bachelor of Science in Agribusiness requires students to take a blend of credits in humanities, fine arts, social sciences and natural sciences during the first two years of their program. In the third and fourth years, the curriculum emphasizes credits in agriculture studies, economics, mathematics, statistics and commerce.

Hobbs said that, to her knowledge, only the University of Guelph in Ontario offers a similar degree program. "We hope to see not only students from across Saskatchewan, but also Alberta, Manitoba and northwestern Ontario," she stated.

Hobbs indicated that the course of study was partly developed on the basis of surveys of potential employers in the agribusiness sector in Western Canada. "That gave us a sense of what skills they were looking for," she said. "Students with this degree will be equipped to work through the agricultural value chain at companies involved in feed, supply, chemicals and food processing."

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She also noted that there will be a strong focus on entrepreneurship in the student experience, to encourage graduates to create their own companies in the growing agribusiness field. It is for that reason that students will study areas such as on-farm business models, processing economics, transportation, credit management and marketing.

Hobbs said that everyone at the Department of Agricultural Economics is excited by this new initiative. Targeted enrolment for the first semester of the new Bachelor of Science in Agribusiness is 50 students, with the first graduates expected to receive their degrees at the university's spring convocation in 2010.

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ROYAL RED ANOTHER CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT

The 2006 edition of the Canadian National Arabian and Half-Arabian Horse Show, otherwise known as the "Royal Red," is now in the books. By all accounts, this year's event, held August 21-26 in Regina, was another smashing success.

"We attracted approximately 1,000 of the finest horses in North America, along with several thousand exhibitors; and we had fantastic fan support, the best I've ever seen," said Bill Hutchinson, Chair of the Royal Red Host Committee.

But with the 2006 show now successfully behind them, the event's organizers will be busy preparing a bid to secure a new multi-year contract for the city to host the show into the future.

Hutchinson noted that the current contract with the Arabian Horse Association (AHA), the organization that oversees the competitions and shows, is coming to an end.

"The current contract is for five years, and (the AHA) had two option years. They have exercised that option to pick up those final two years. That will take us through 2007 and 2008," he said.

"The next major milestone in our relationship with the AHA is to try to secure a new multi-year contract to retain the show in Regina. And we expect that we will likely have to prepare a bid and make our presentation over the course of the coming winter."

Hutchinson feels the ongoing success of the Royal Red will help the city make a good impression on the decision-makers.

"One of the main advantages that Regina has is our central location on the continent. Another advantage we have is one of Canada's largest agricultural facilities. And, something that the Arabian Horse Association appreciates very much, is the dedication and the professionalism of the staff at Ipsco Place," he said.

"So we have a variety of pluses to offer them, in addition to the activities that are carried out by our great volunteer army and the Royal Red Host Committee."

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Hutchinson added that the friendliness and hospitality of Saskatchewan people is also a tremendous asset to event organizers.

"There are two kinds of support [participants] really appreciate. They really appreciate the fan support – the fact that people care enough about the show and love the horses enough to come and participate is very much appreciated and noticed by our competitors," he said.

"The other kind of support that they really comment upon is the support in the public. Everybody in this community knows that the Royal Red is in town, everybody knows that there are people from all over North America coming to compete in this show, and they readily offer their support and hospitality. If people need assistance finding their way, figuring out where to eat or shop – all sorts of very kind, friendly, neighbourly advice is offered to our guests. They notice this very much, and it's one of our strongest selling points as a host city."

Hutchinson stated that an ambitious plan for the renewal of facilities at Ipsco Place will also be an important part of their pitch. "The AHA is always very conscious of the state of the facilities where it puts on its shows. When you're bringing in animals of this quality and this value, it simply has to be a major factor in your decision-making."

Hutchinson pointed out that the Royal Red is truly one of the continent's premier equine events. "It is the largest show of its kind in Canada, and one of the top [horse] shows in North America," he said.

"Because of its international prestige, the show attracts participants from all over Canada and the U.S. We've seen people from as far away as Alaska, California and Florida, and the maritime provinces."

But according to Hutchinson, some of the best competitors come from right here in the province. "We always have fabulous competition from Saskatchewan horse owners. They're right up there with the best."

Hutchinson also noted the tremendous economic contribution the Royal Red makes to Regina and Saskatchewan each year, estimated to be around $10 million. In addition, spectators from all over the province get treated to an amazing, one-of-a-kind experience, he said.

"There are some really terrific benefits for Regina and all of Saskatchewan from hosting this event," Hutchinson stated. "We should feel very honoured to host it, but also very proud of the tremendous show we put on year after year."

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SILVOPASTURE RESEARCH REVEALING SURPRISING BENEFITS

We've all heard of a win-win situation, but an old practice that is new to Saskatchewan has the potential to be a win-win-win-win for the province.

Initial research data is expected soon from two silvopasture pilot projects at Foam Lake and Pleasantdale.

Simply put, silvopasture is the practice of growing trees in a pasture. It sounds straight-forward, but research is required to determine the practice's potential in Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Forest Centre is providing funding for the project, and has worked with the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute (PAMI) and the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) on the initiative.

The initial attraction to the practice of silvopasture was the ability to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere while producing forest products. The downside was presumed to be a reduction in the forage crop on a pasture due to the competition from the trees.

Leduc said the pilot projects are about determining the potential benefits of the silvopasture practice, which include carbon sequestration, wood production (for either pulp and paper or lumber) and improved grass and livestock production.

Leduc said there is still a vast amount of research that needs to be done to determine the advantages and the best practices, but the potential exists for four distinct benefits: to reduce greenhouse gases, to create a wood product, to improve forage quality and to improve livestock production as a result of the improved forage.

Initial results from the Pleasantdale and Foam Lake projects are expected this year. At present, the data being collected is more focused on the trees than the forage. The trees are still young, and it will take a number of years before they will affect the forage.

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"At this point, we're just getting started to look at the issue," said Leduc. "I think there's going to be research done for quite a number of years to really examine this, because it has never been looked at. We've never really looked at what trees might grow well and won't be damaged by livestock, and we haven't really looked at whether there is significant benefit to having trees in a pasture – until now."

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VALUE CHAINS A GOOD WAY TO DIVERSIFY AGRICULTURE

It's all about building partnerships to strengthen Saskatchewan's agricultural industry.

That's the concept behind value chains, which promote multiple stakeholders in a supply chain working together to diversify a specific area of the agricultural sector.

Value chains can include any mix of producers, processors, distributors, brokers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers collaborating to meet a specific market need. The groups generally agree to co-operate in order to help build competitive advantage, identify marketing opportunities and improve industry response to market demand.

Here's an example of how the process might work: a group of lentil producers might work with a processor and a retailer to develop a new lentil soup for the marketplace.

The retailer could help the producers work with the processor on packaging, and provide information on retail pricing requirements.

The producers would secure a long-term contract with the marketer for a specific quality and grade, and the processor would be guaranteed a supply of ingredients for the length of the contract.

The retailer might provide feedback to the processor and producers regarding sales, inventory and consumer comments, which could then be used to improve the product.

According to Gary Coghill, the Value Chain Development Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), encouraging this sort of teamwork has loads of potential to bolster the Saskatchewan value-added agricultural industry.

"The value chain concept could really apply to any food product idea, and even beyond, to things like manufacturing animal feed or using agricultural products for energy or biofuel development," said Coghill. "The scope for co-operation is unlimited."

The seemingly endless economic development and diversification opportunities prompted SAF to establish the Value Chain Program, which offers financial support and technical expertise to parties interested in forming value chains.

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Funding is available on a 50-50 cost-sharing basis to approved applicants. It can be accessed in two phases. Up to $30,000 can be tapped to build awareness, develop the value chain concept and conduct training events, while an additional $70,000 can be accessed for the actual value chain implementation and related initiatives.

Coghill stated that the program has provided funding to around 10 value chain projects since it first began accepting applications in June of 2005. So far, most of the initiatives have centred around meat or grain and oilseed products, but "almost everything can potentially fit under this," he noted.

Value chains can be started by groups in the supply chain simply wanting to get together to develop ideas, but more commonly seem to be spurred by an actual market demand that's already out there waiting to be met, according to Coghill.

"It's often driven by the consumer," he noted. "The uniqueness of a product in demand drives the retailer to seek a supplier, who might then seek out a processor to provide the product, who might then approach a group of producers to supply the commodity to be processed."

He added, "They end up working together to generate added value for everybody in the supply chain. All the partners see some benefit."

Coghill stated that a series of workshops has been organized by SAF and the Saskatchewan Council for Community Development (SCCD) for anyone interested in learning more about value chains.

The next ones are taking place in Saskatoon on October 24 and 25. They constitute modules four and five in the workshop series, discussing Marketing and Category Management related to value chain development.

However, Coghill stressed that anyone can attend these workshops, even if they have not attended the previous sessions. "Even if people didn't attend the first three workshops in the spring, there will be an opportunity to pick them up again at a later date. The order is not as important as being able to obtain the overall information," he said.

More details on the workshops can be found on the SCCD website at www.sccd.sk.ca. Additional information on value chains or the Value Chain Program specifically can be obtained by calling Gary Coghill at (306) 787-8537, or visiting the SAF website at www.agr.gov.sk.ca (under Processing).

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ALFALFA THE FOCUS OF INTENSIVE SEMINAR

Some of the leading alfalfa experts and forage researchers in North America will be in Saskatoon later this month for the Western Canadian Alfalfa Training Seminar.

The two-day seminar, taking place September 20 and 21, will feature experts from here at home, from across Western Canada and from as far away as Wisconsin and Kentucky.

The seminar will be held at the Sandman Hotel in Saskatoon, with a registration cost of $400. It is being hosted in partnership with the Saskatchewan Forage Council and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food. Funding for this event was provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Greencover Canada Program.

Janice Bruynooghe, the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Forage Council, says the goal is to provide a very intensive seminar.

"What we are trying to do is bring in those people who are specific experts or researchers in this field," she said. "That's why we've got three different researchers and agronomists from the United States, out of both the University of Kentucky and the University of Wisconsin, and then we've also gone across Western Canada and brought in researchers from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and specialists with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, as well some private industry people who have made alfalfa research their life's work."

The seminar will delve into alfalfa topics from seed to feed, including the history and importance of alfalfa, genetics and variety selection, use of alfalfa in rotations and pest management for alfalfa. Bruynooghe says the seminar is geared to a higher level of learning.

"We've been able to bring in presenters who are looking at specific areas of alfalfa research. For example, if we are looking at a topic like alfalfa fertility, we've chosen someone who's doing their research and their primary focus is alfalfa fertility. Rather than just generalize, we've brought in the specialist who can speak to and provide participants with a very specific look at the topic," explained Bruynooghe.

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Because it is an intensive training session, Bruynooghe says organizers are targeting it at feed industry representatives, government specialists and those who work in the agriculture supply industry. However, primary producers and farmers will also find a great deal of benefit. In fact, the seminar has been approved for Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS) funding, so those enrolled in the CASS program can qualify for a reimbursement. It has also been approved for professional development hours both for the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists, as well as for the continuing education unit for certified crop advisors.

More information on the seminar can be found at www.saskforage.ca.

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